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**Author:** Monika Żak

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**Monika Żak\***

University of Silesia

ORCID 0000-0002-3472-1864

## INSTABILITY OR BALANCE? WORK – LIFE DYNAMICS IN LIVES OF POLICEMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES

The aim of this article is to present the results of research on the possibilities of reconciling family and professional life in the service of a Polish police officer. The presented material is the result of research carried out among police officers on the issue of the influence of service on their personal lives. The analysis was based on the concept of a work-life balance and concerns several of the most important aspects of the lives of policemen and their families:

- time of service and time for personal life;
- leisure time activities;
- sustainability of relationships and the functioning of families;
- social relations.

The text contains analysis of the statements of officers as well as those in their immediate surroundings.

Keywords: police officer, work, family, work-life balance

### INTRODUCTION – THE CONCEPT OF “WORK-LIFE BALANCE” FROM A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The question of work-life balance was a topic of interest for researchers in the early 1990s. “Work and family are the two most recognised domains in one’s life given the amount of time spent in these domains, and the variety of experiences, emotions, and challenges experienced when performing specific roles within them” (Kalliath, Hughes and Newcombe 2012: 355). This was related to several important changes that took place mainly in the professional and personal lives of women. The 1970s and 80s in developed countries are characterised by the massive entry of women into the labour market (Sysko-Romańczuk and Zdrzenicka 2011: 88). Women have become active participants in this market, which has contributed to changes in their personal lives and changes in the traditional family model (male breadwinner

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\* Corresponding author: Monika Żak, Uniwersytet Śląski w Katowicach, Wydział Nauk Społecznych, Instytut Socjologii, ul. Bankowa 11, 40-007 Katowice; e-mail: [monika.zak@us.edu.pl](mailto:monika.zak@us.edu.pl).

model – female home carer) and the introduction of new model (dual earner model), which may have occurred as a double burden on a woman (dual earner model – dual burden of females), where, in addition to her household and family responsibilities, she also carried out professional tasks, or in the form of a partnership model (dual earner model – dual career model), where both spouses equally fulfilled their domestic and professional responsibilities. These changes have triggered another alteration in the form of the social roles of women and men: the boundaries between typically feminine and typically masculine roles have gradually become blurred, and a shift towards egalitarian treatment of partners and spouses has occurred.

Interest in work-life balance issues is also related to massive technological development. The emergence of mobile phones, digitalisation and the possibility to be online nearly 24 hours a day has resulted in the blurring of the boundaries between work life (in most cases previously limited to the workplace) and personal life for those in some professions. Employees have come to perform their duties at any given time and in any given place, made possible by the development of digital and communication technologies. An overload of work, which is a consequence of the full availability of employees, has resulted in increasing levels of professional stress, with both somatic and psychological consequences (Chirkowska-Smolak 2008: 237).

Not without significance for the origins of interest in the discussed issue is the existence of the so-called “greedy institutions”, which expect total dedication from their employees, demanding all of their attention, time and energy, which clearly translates into the possibility of their functioning in the non-professional area (Burchielli, Bartram and Thanacoody 2008: 109). A greedy institution will “[...] make total claims on their members and [...] attempt to encompass within their circle the whole personality [...], seek exclusive and undivided loyalty” (Cosser 1974: 4). Being a part of such an institution makes it impossible to balance work and personal life.

All these factors have led employees into a conflict between professional and personal roles (Benligiray and Sönmez 2012: 3892). This conflict may take one form or occur in every aspect, i.e. time-based conflict, role conflict, and behaviour-based conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985: 77–82). Awareness of these conflicts and the capacity to prevent or resolve them is one of the most important prerequisites for maintaining balance in the work/life cycle.

Therefore, what is this balance? In the literature on the subject there are many different definitions that focus on several important aspects:

- the possibility of balancing and effectively performing several social roles at the same time;
- achieving success in both professional and personal life;
- making conscious choices about professional and personal development (Clutterbuck 2005: 26; Chirkowska-Smolak 2008: 236; Stankiewicz-Mróz 2008: 314).

The individual adjusts their roles and activity to the time and spatial possibilities. These constitute a platform on which a person can function effectively, in line with personal choices. For the purpose of this paper, let us consider work-life balance as an opportunity for harmonious development on many different levels of human activity without compromising any of them. It is the ability to balance the fulfilment of professional and non-professional roles, particularly those of employees and parents. There are no publications in the literature

concerning the work-life balance of police officers. Most analyses concentrate on the impact of stress on the health and interpersonal relations of police officers. In view of the above, the present article is based on studies that contain general discussions pertaining to work-life balance. Such an approach to balance will thus serve as a background for a discussion on the possibility of balancing the official and private roles of police officers and their families. Table 1 presents the characteristic features of the police service and the most important consequences of performing the role of a police officer.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the police service

<b>Police service – characteristic features</b>	
Permanent employment guarantee Remuneration Social prestige of the profession Shift work, working hours Place of employment Rank, function, hierarchy of service The number and nature of official duties Professional development pathway	
<b>Consequences of police service</b>	
<b>health and mental</b>	<b>for non-professional life</b>
Stress Insomnia Depression Hyperactivity, nervousness Professional burn-out Alcohol abuse Suicides and suicide attempts	Stability of relationships Marital/partnership relations Conflicts in marriage and family Divorce Children's socialisation and upbringing Ways of spending leisure time Selection of friends and acquaintances

The table has been prepared on the basis of the author's observations and the pilot studies conducted (free-form interviews with police officers). It has become a certain framework for further in-depth analyses.

## METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to determine the influence of the police service on the non-work sphere of life of officers and their families. Police service is one of the high-risk professions, which are characterised by specific work duties, difficult working conditions and high levels of stress. At the same time, it is a profession in the public trust and requires from its adepts an impeccable professional and moral attitude not only in the course of service, but also in personal life.

The research, a small fragment of which will be presented in this article, was carried out among police officers participating in courses conducted by the Police School in Piła.

The study was carried out during the officers' free time outside the school, which allowed obtaining relatively extensive answers. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Approximately 1,200 questionnaires were distributed, of which 912 fully filled in questionnaires have been used for the analysis (57 women, 855 men). Respondents represented various socio-demographic features, and the variables related to gender, age, and years of service were used in particular for the analysis. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected police officers and their family members, and reaching them (similarly to the case of questionnaires) was carried out by means of the "snowball" method. Thanks to the implementation of a both qualitative and quantitative method, it was possible to obtain a more detailed picture of the analysed problems.

The assumption was to explore the impact of service on the personal lives of police officers. Therefore, the survey encompassed those with at least 3 years of service. They participated in specialist courses organised by the Police School in the city of Piła that target officers employed in different police units all over the country. The participants are sent to the courses by their immediate superiors and, in the vast majority of cases, they are men (the Polish police force employs approximately 13.7% female officers). The selection of respondents for the survey was therefore based on whether they had been sent to participate in the course, but the respondents filled out the questionnaires on a voluntary basis. The in-depth interviews encompassed those police officers who had agreed to take part in them and subsequently recommended more candidates via snowballing. In a few cases, it was possible to conduct interviews with the police officers' families and close relatives.

The free-form interviews were conducted with 54 police officers. 23 policemen's wives and 3 police women's husbands were also interviewed. The interviewees were aged between 30 and 54 years. Sixteen of them held a university degree, eight had secondary vocational education, and two had general secondary education. All of them worked in white-collar professions. The respondents participating in the free-form interviews were selected on the basis of their good knowledge of the police environment, as well as their personal experiences related to the impact of police service on their private and family lives. The interviews lasted, on average, about two hours and were held without any third parties involved, which made it possible to obtain honest and exhaustive information as regards the subject of the study.

The respondents work in police units all across the country (Lower Silesia Province – 6%, Kujawy-Pomerania Province – 4%; Lublin Province – 3%, Lubuskie Province – 1%, Łódź Province – 13%, Małopolska Province – 8%, Mazovia Province – 16%, Opole Province – 4%, Podkarpacie Province – 2%, Podlasie Province – 1%, Pomerania Province – 7%, Silesia Province – 11%, Świętokrzyskie Province – 1%, Warmia-Masuria Province – 7%, Wielkopolska Province – 14%, and West Pomerania Province – 2%).

The type of services performed by the police officers included prevention (56.5%), criminal (31.5%), and assisting activities (12%). The respondent police officers held the following ranks (a percentage summary): senior police constable – 2.5%; sergeant class II – 6.8%; sergeant class I – 6.3%; staff sergeant – 6.4%; junior warrant officer – 13.6%; warrant officer class II – 14.5%; warrant officer class I – 23.2%; staff warrant officer – 14%; second lieutenant – 8.6%; lieutenant – 3.2%; and captain – 1%. The personal situation (marital status, children) of respondents is described in the table 2.

**Table 2.** Marital status vs the number of children [%]

Marital status		Children						Total
		one child	two children	three children	four children	five or more children	childless	
		N = 285	N = 375	N = 59	N = 35	N = 2	N = 156	
Married for the first time	N = 297	31.3	45.5	8.1	4.4	0.3	10.4	100
Married for the second time	N = 174	35.1	50.0	4.6	3.4	0.0	6.9	100
Married for the third and subsequent time [s]	N = 7	28.6	0.0	14.3	14.3	0.0	42.8	100
Separated	N = 108	21.3	49.1	4.6	6.5	0.9	17.6	100
Cohabiting in a conjugal relationship	N = 171	29.2	45.0	9.4	4.1	0.0	12.3	100
Single after divorce	N = 112	36.6	18.8	3.6	0.9	0.0	40.1	100
Single (bachelor, maiden)	N = 39	30.8	5.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	64.1	100
Widowed	N = 4	75.0	0.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100
Total	N = 912	31.3	41.1	6.5	3.8	0.2	17.1	100

## INSTABILITY OR BALANCE? POLICE OFFICERS AND THEIR FAMILIES ABOUT LIFE IN SERVICE

One of the most important conflicts that can affect employees is time-based conflict, which manifests itself in the inappropriate and inadequate allocation of time between different domains of human activity. Involvement in work or life outside of work is so time absorbing that performing all social roles properly is impossible. Therefore, the key is to have a proper daily rhythm. The police force is a professional group that takes care of order and security in the country and performs its duty permanently. At the same time, officers very often perform their tasks after hours of duty if the well-being of a case or circumstances requires it. How much time do police officers spend on-duty? More than half of the respondents admitted that they spend between 40 and 60 hours a week (53.7%) but one in three respondents indicated that they dedicated more than 60 hours a week (31.3%) to the service. One out of every ten surveyed persons devotes up to 40 hours a week to professional work (10.7%). 4.3% of the respondents were unable to answer this question.

[...] shift work and in general scheduled standby duty is just a fiction. You never know when you finish your work, because the events you deal with are very different – from “simple” thefts to more complicated ones such as robbery or murder. Such a situation is naturally embedded in the police service, so not everyone is suitable for this job (Male 38 years old, 15 years of service).

The results indicate that in the case of police officers we are dealing with working time significantly longer than average.<sup>1</sup> This is primarily due to the specific nature of the service and the number and character of professional duties performed: the officer has to devote as much time and energy as necessary to perform them properly, because the efficient functioning of society depends on it. It is of course connected with the necessity to adjust not only one's own daily rhythm, but also that of relatives. The family also faces the consequences of such a working mode, which in many cases results in conflicts, loosening/breaking of bonds, and even family break-up.

For my husband, service in the Police is a calling – he takes a very responsible approach to his duties, which unfortunately affects the amount of time he spends in the unit and in the field. [...] It is very difficult to plan a day, a week or even a short holiday, and visits to family or friends are postponed several times (Female 39 years old, wife of an officer with a 19 years of service).

In their responses, the police officers indicate that the distinction between their private and professional lives is becoming blurred:

It's no good if you can't stop thinking about your work even on holiday. My wife claims that, even though I am physically with the family, my thoughts keep wandering back to work – that is not good for our family relationships. The children need a father who is unreservedly dedicated to them after work while my wife expects help and support in daily duties (Male, 42 years old, 20 years of service).

Often, when I go to work, I don't know what time I will be back home – if required, I stay on duty as long as possible...It also happened that I had to miss my planned family holiday because I had to report for duty – my partner and children were deeply affected by the situation (Male, 35 years old, 12 years of service).

Officers who have chosen the service on the basis of a particular calling take their duties very seriously, which is reflected in the amount of time they devote to them. This is often carried out at the expense of other aspects of life: family, friends and acquaintances, leisure time, etc. The awareness of responsibility towards the country and the importance of the professional oath means that many policemen devote themselves completely to the service, even at the cost of personal life. Those concerned observe that the hardships related to police service are closely correlated with the responsibilities within the particular areas of the prevention, criminal, and assistance departments. This stems from the differences in the tasks they deal with. The preventive department primarily involves prevention and intervention measures, road service, as well as the work of district and undercover police officers. The criminal department encompasses operational and reconnaissance activities, investigative measures and the fight against economic crime. The assisting department is, generally speaking, associated with logistics services, including police training schools and centres.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the research carried out by Kantar Millward Brown for Work Service, it appears that on average Poles work about 45 hours a week, <https://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/Polacy-pracuja-srednio-45-godz-tygodniowo-4009446.html>.

The police officers from crime investigation departments spend the most time on duty. Tasks that they carry out force these situations. You can't interrupt, say, an observation, because you're finishing a daily shift of service. Sometimes you have to be on duty until the end of the operation – in practice a shift can be 24 hours or longer. Of course, this is done at the expense of personal life and health too (Male 36, 12 years of service).

Awareness of a lack of balance is the first step in an attempt to achieving or restoring it, which above all involves increasing the amount of time for non-work activity. The surveyed officers who declared they had their own family were asked to specify the amount of time they spent a week on their family members and relatives. The largest group were those who declared that they spent around 21–30 hours a week with relatives (31.9%). Every fifth respondent admitted that he/she had about 11–20 hours for the family (21.6%). 13% of respondents devote more than 30 hours a week to their families, but 19.6% indicated that this time is only up to a maximum of 10 hours given that a week consists of 7 days, it is an alarmingly low amount. Over 13% of officers were unable to determine how much time they spend with the family during the week. If we compare these data with the information on the time devoted to the service, there is a picture of a Polish policeman who is overworked and who, apart from the service, has little time to perform other social roles.

I dedicated myself entirely to the firm (Police – author's note). As a young policeman, I wanted to fix the world and so years of service have passed. But it doesn't work this way – you can't take this approach to service, because you quickly burn out seeing the ineffectiveness of your own work. In retrospect, I can see that it was not sensible – I lost my family, I only have friends from the company and the prospect of a single retirement terrifies me. I will not go back, I can only make young people aware not to make my mistakes and divide their working time and time for themselves and their loved ones (Male 52, 30 years of service).

Police officers' families very often suffer the consequences of the nature of their service. They must adapt to the possibilities and forms of spending time with an officer. In the case of families with children, this is even more difficult because both parents should actively take part in the process of upbringing, especially when it comes to large families. Children do not perceive the work of parents as a service and mission; all they expect is attention, care and involvement. In practice, this leads to a double burden on the parent who is not so heavily absorbed with professional work.

My husband tries to spend as much time with us as possible, but, it's still too little. He has little time for children, for me, for his hobby or even to catch his breath. It's good that I have a regular working time and can be at home in the afternoon and at weekends, otherwise the children would only see their parents in the photos. [...] This has no positive impact on the relationship between us – the children are becoming more and more aware of it and are starting to rebel. [...] (Female 41 years old, wife of a police officer with 20 years of service).

Irregular working hours, risks related to the nature of work duties, high levels of stress – all this means that professional problems are often transferred to the family environment. This results in conflicts which, in the long term, can lead to the break-up of relationships



and families. Statistics show that it is very difficult to maintain consistency in marriages in which conflicts often occur and that this can lead to divorce<sup>2</sup>. Many respondents pointed out how difficult it was to balance service with family life and that this usually happened at the expense of the latter. The surveyed officers were asked: *Do you think that in “uniformed” marriages, where at least one of the spouses performs service in the Police, divorces occur more often than in “non-uniformed” marriages?* The answers given by the respondents show that the vast majority of them see a link between police service and the divorce rate. 20.5% of respondents believe that divorces definitely occur more often in “uniformed” marriages than in civil marriages. The largest group, on the other hand, are those who believe that divorce occurs rather more often in police officers’ marriages (49.1%). Only 1.9% of respondents believe that the police service has no connection with the frequency of divorce, and 10.5% believe that practically no such connection exists. 18% of respondents were not able to determine what impact the police service may have on the frequency of divorce. The results clearly indicate that the majority of officers perceive the possibility of a correlation between their professional work and the probability of police officer’s marriage ending with divorce.

In my opinion, service in the Police is not beneficial for a long-lasting marriage. I’ve seen the destructive effects of service conditions on marriage relations. Lack of time, nervousness, relaxation in matters of morality, all this makes the marriage of police officers much less permanent than that of civilians (Female 36 years, 10 years of service).

The workload associated working in a high-risk profession, although it covers a large number of aspects (particularly concentrated around high stress and high availability), is in consequence related to work-life imbalance. This is reflected both in the amount of time and the tension caused by the inability to balance these two domains. Police officers, as well as members of their families and people from the immediate circle, are aware that this is a role which to a large extent determines all levels of activity. The outcome of this is the amount of free time (usually its lack) and the form of spending it. Leisure time is a prerequisite for maintaining a balance in life: it enables the regeneration of mental and physical forces, improves health and gives opportunities for physical and spiritual self-development. (Naumowicz 1987: 27–30). The respondents, when asked about how they spend their leisure time, declared that the primary focus during their leisure time was on household duties (25.4%). A slightly smaller group consisted of policemen, who during their free time were most willing to help in learning and doing homework with children (21.1%). Free time is not synonymous with time for resting and recreation, but with the performance of home and family functions and tasks.

While working at home (cleaning, cooking or ironing), I forget about my work problems and, strangely, I relax. Indeed, it may sound awkward, but in my case, housework brings relief and relaxation after the difficulties of service, because it is something normal in contrast to the abnormal working conditions of my job (Female 43 years old, 18 years of service).

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<sup>2</sup> According to the data provided by the Central Statistical Office for 2015, as the main reason for divorce, spouses declare incompatibility of character (29% of all divorces), lack of marital fidelity (7.66%) and alcoholism (5.2% of divorces). [www.gus.gov.pl](http://www.gus.gov.pl) [07.12.2017].

Definitely fewer officers most often and willingly spend their time doing various kinds of sports (12.5%), which is closely related to maintaining the good physical condition necessary in the service of a policeman. Many respondents also declared that they spent leisure time with friends (9.6%) and used computers and the Internet (8.6%). For 6.3% of respondents, the most common form of spending their leisure time is playing with child(ren) and taking family strolls. On the other hand, 4.3% of the researched policemen spend their free time watching TV, and 3.9% catching up on their professional backlog. The least frequently mentioned forms of leisure time were sleeping (3%), family trips (2.1%), reading books (1.5%) and visiting the extended family (1.2%). The results of the research show unequivocally that officers' free time is first of all time for home and family and, possibly, an opportunity to improve their physical condition. The occurrence of catching up on work in some responses indicates a clear lack of boundaries between work and personal life of some police officers. The tensions resulting from the role of a policeman make it difficult or even impossible to fully carry out the role of a family member, friend etc.

In the case of police officers, the conflict between work and personal life may also concern the choice of one's friends. Officers who are required to be morally and ethically impeccable cannot afford to be acquainted with people who are suspected of criminal activity, for example.

When I'm with my workmates, I don't have to be careful not to say too much. Those are guys who do what I do, so some issues needn't be left unsaid. On the contrary, sometimes when I want to get something off my chest or ask for advice, I know that I can count on them. And who else can help me better than a good colleague who is in the same boat. [...] The only problem with such a deal is that our wives sometimes need to "bring us back to reality" during parties, because we tend to go on about our work and it gets on their nerves [...] (Male 39 years old, 14 years of service).

I have to be very careful about who I develop closer relationships with because a policeman cannot be suspected of maintaining contacts with criminal elements. In practice, this means that we usually make friends with our colleagues (Female, 42 years old, 20 years of service).

This results in the police service determining, to a certain extent, the social life of officers. Nearly half (48.7%) of the respondents admitted that their work colleagues constitute a significant group of people with whom they maintain social relations outside the workplace as well. Less than a quarter of officers (23.5%) indicated that the closest group of friends included mainly friends of the spouse or partner. Only every tenth policeman pointed to his neighbours as his closest friends. Slightly fewer (9.8%) consider colleagues from school and university years as their closest friends. The police officers themselves argue this as follows:

The bonds that are formed in the service are often transferred to private life. Our families (policemen's – author's note) also stick together – wives become friends, because they are bound by the common marital situation, children spend holidays together, and so on. It is easier to be friends with people from the department, because there is no need to pretend anything, you can discuss professional issues, which facilitates relations (Male 49 years old, 26 years of service).

Police officers very often do not want to be accused of having contacts with people of dubious reputation, and they try not to allow them to enter their immediate surroundings.

This can be difficult, especially when certain childhood relationships in adult life cannot continue, hence the necessity to end them. Performing a high-risk profession has strong repercussions regarding who may belong to a police officer's closest circle of friends. The nature of the service and, above all, the significance of the problems with which he/she has to deal on a daily basis in his/her professional work, means that when selecting persons for closer contacts, he/she must apply a process of elimination, and criteria to reduce the risk of allowing unwanted persons in his/her company.

## CONCLUSION

The issue of work-life balance or lack thereof is a difficult one. This is because it results from the character of service and the conditions that it imposes on police officers and their families. Constant readiness, high levels of stress and lack of time tend to disturb the balance, usually at the expense of the personal lives of officers. Not only those interested but also, or perhaps most importantly, their families suffer the consequences resulting from the inability to balance the professional and personal life. There is a clear imbalance here, to the detriment of personal life. Time-based conflict, role conflict and behaviour-based conflict that underlie the imbalance between work and personal life is clearly evident in the case of police officers (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985: 77–82). The amount of time devoted to work duties in relation to personal life is by far disproportionate. It is not possible to properly perform family roles in the absence of time and commitment from officers, which is unfortunately often the case today. In the opinion of the police officers and their families surveyed, divorces occur much more frequently in “uniformed” marriages, which are mostly the result of an officer's lack of time for the family, the danger associated with the performance of official duties, and often a lack of understanding of the professional situation by one's life partner.

The most distinctive working conditions that can affect the personal and family life of officers include irregular working hours, shift work, exposure to risk of loss of health and life, contact with crime, place of service, rank, and affiliation to particular divisions. These factors, due to their specific character, obviously affect the life of officers by determining their professional, social and even personal situations. The solution would have to be system-wide and concern the entire police force as an organisation which could prepare and implement programmes facilitating the balance of energy and time dedicated to work and family. (Dąbrowska 2014: 45).

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#### CHWIEJNOŚĆ CZY BALANS? DYNAMIKA PRACY I ŻYCIA OSOBISTEGO POLICJANTÓW I ICH RODZIN

Celem artykułu jest prezentacja wyników badań dotyczących możliwości godzenia życia rodzinnego z zawodowym z służbie polskiego policjanta. Prezentowany materiał jest efektem badań przeprowadzonych wśród funkcjonariuszy Policji na temat wpływu służby na ich życie osobiste. Analiza została oparta na koncepcji „równowaga praca–życie” i dotyczy kilku najważniejszych aspektów życia policjantów i ich rodzin:

- czasu służby oraz czasu na życie osobiste;
- form spędzania wolnego czasu;
- trwałości związków i funkcjonowania rodzin;
- relacji towarzyskich.

Tekst zawiera zarówno analizę wypowiedzi funkcjonariuszy, jak i osób z ich najbliższego otoczenia.

Słowa kluczowe: policjant, praca, rodzina, równowaga praca–życie